

What are DNR and others doing to improve forest health in Washington?

State and Federal Agencies and Tribes are active in efforts to improve forest health conditions in Washington. Efforts include monitoring, treatments such as spraying and prescribed fire, and improving education for landowners. Some of the specific efforts include the following:

- DNR's Forest Health Program conducts annual monitoring of forest insects and diseases and acquired over \$2 million in federal grants for bark beetle prevention, suppression and education activities in eastern Washington.
- DNR's Forest Health Program provides over 2,000 technical assistance contacts annually to landowners and land managers.
- In 2004, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation treated over 6,000 acres of hazardous fuel treatments with prescribed fire — most of which occurred within designated Wildland Urban Interface areas.
- DNR State Lands is actively pursuing silvicultural treatments to address forest health. Between June 2004 and June 2007, DNR will have treated approximately 14,000 acres of at risk forested state trust lands.
- Federal land management agencies are implementing recommendations made in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and the President's Healthy Forest Initiative.
- In 2004 the Okanogan and Wenatchee National forests completed over 22,000 acres of hazardous fuels treatments.

Contact Information

For more information about Washington's Forest Health or the Forest Health Strategy Work Group, please visit DNR's Forest Health website at: www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/rp/forhealth/fhswgc/index.html

The website also contains links to the Forest Health Strategy Work Group page which includes a current draft of the proposed legislation and details on opportunities for public involvement.

Above left, Ponderosa pine stand that has had some trees removed to reduce crowding and provide more resources for the healthiest trees. Doug Maguire, Oregon State University, www.forestryimages.org

forest health

In 2005, over 2.5 million acres of forest land contained elevated levels of tree mortality, tree defoliation, or foliage diseases.

Right, Removing the bark from the base of this dead tree reveals that it was killed by Armillaria root disease. Root diseases can be difficult to detect before trees die. DNR Forest Health Staff

Healthy Forests Provide Abundant and Diverse Benefits for Washington Residents

Healthy forests provide the public with a wide variety of goods and services, including wildlife habitat, clean and abundant water for communities, agriculture and industrial operations as well as fish and riparian dependent species. They also provide a sense of place for residents in local communities, outstanding vistas and viewsheds for the public at large, and a means of reducing the escalating cost of fire suppression.

Unfortunately, forest lands in Washington State are at risk. Washington has approximately 21 million acres of forestland. In 2005, over 2.5 million acres of this land contained elevated levels of tree mortality, tree defoliation, or foliage diseases. Other recent surveys detected serious root diseases throughout the state. Populations of western spruce budworm, a native defoliating caterpillar, are rising in eastern Washington and expected to cause significant damage. In addition, high levels of tree mortality caused by pine and fire bark beetles continue in eastern Washington.





Basic forestry practices that reduce tree crowding can reduce or prevent unacceptable damage from insects, disease and fire.

Top: This ponderosa pine tree is heavily infested with dwarf mistletoe, a parasitic plant that affects tree growth and water conduction. It will kill this tree. DNR Forest Health Staff

Bottom: “Douglas-fir tussock moth caterpillars can eat all the foliage of Douglas-fir and grand fir trees, causing growth losses and tree mortality. Their toxic hairs are a health hazard to people. They thrive in overcrowded forests and outbreaks appear to be increasing in frequency and damage.” DNR Forest Health Staff



Top: Although fire is a natural part of Washington’s forest ecosystems, the crowding, connectivity and amount of dead trees present influences the way trees burn and the amount of injury that occurs. In general, fires which burn through tree crowns or burn very hot on the ground are the most damaging. Forest management influences the way future fires will burn. Dave Powell, USDA Forest Service, www.forestryimages.org

Bottom: “Insecticides may be applied to forests in order to eradicate exotic insects or to reduce damage from native insects.” DNR Forest Health Staff

Forest Health Strategy Group makes Recommendations for Healthy Forests

In 2004, under the direction of the State Legislature, Commissioner of Public Lands, Doug Sutherland, assembled the Forest Health Strategy Work Group (FHSWG). This group, consisting of 14 individuals knowledgeable about forests, forest ecology, or forest health issues developed a report titled “A Desirable Forest Health Program for Washington’s Forests”. The report addresses forest health needs on public and private lands with the goal of protecting a wide variety of public benefits and describes current opportunities and barriers for improving forest health. The recommendations made in the report, including a draft legislative proposal, are intended to empower landowners, strengthen state government services, and complement current Forest Practices Rules.

In June 2006, Commissioner Sutherland reassembled the Forest Health Strategy Work Group. Again, under direction of the State Legislature, the 2006 FHSWG will build upon the previous work by holding meetings across the state to listen to the public’s concerns about forest health and proposed legislation. Information gathered during these meetings will then be used to craft a comprehensive forest health bill for the legislature’s consideration in the 2007 session.



Forest Health Bill proposed by Forest Health Strategy Work Group

As drafted by the FHSWG, the proposed legislation seeks to improve forest health conditions by authorizing DNR to monitor forest conditions and changes over time in coordination with universities, landowners, and state and federal agencies. It would also authorize DNR to provide technical and informational assistance to landowners, and would authorize the Lands Commissioner to establish technical advisory committees, as needed, in areas threatened by forest health conditions. The draft legislation calls for DNR to establish cooperative forest health projects to control and contain outbreaks of insects and disease.

The draft legislation describes a three-tiered system that would accomplish these goals. The first tier is intended to protect forests from fire, insects and disease and the effects of wind and ice storms. Information and technical assistance would be available to forest landowners so they can plan for and implement necessary forest health evaluation, maintenance and restoration activities.

The second tier is based on landowners’ voluntary efforts to contain, suppress, and otherwise manage the development of forest health hazards. When a critical problem such as a windstorm or insect outbreak develops, site-specific information, technical assistance, and project coordination services would be offered to landowners as funding allows. A forest health technical advisory committee could be engaged under this approach to evaluate the threat, consider the need for action and offer recommendations on potential methods for control. While it is voluntary, landowners who fail to take action necessary to reduce the hazards associated with poor forest health may be subject to increased liability under this proposed legislation.

The third tier would only occur when voluntary efforts are not implemented successfully. The proposed legislation would require action by the landowner when a significant forest health threat is present, including the spread to multiple ownerships or when the potential for fuels build-up could significantly decrease the ability to control a wild fire. In this situation, the Commissioner of Public Lands, with advice of a forest health technical advisory committee, would issue a forest health hazard order specifying actions the landowner must take to reduce the risk or hazard.

The FHSWG is seeking comments from landowners and the public on the proposed legislation. As information is gathered, it is likely that the proposal will change prior to being considered during the 2007 legislative session. To see a current copy of the proposed legislation, please visit DNR’s website at: www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/rp/forhealth/fhswgc/index.html